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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of full-time employment, marriage, and parenthood on the re-enrollment in college of individuals who stopped attending college before completing a degree. Data were obtained from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72), focusing on the initial 7 years of the tracking period, from 1972 through 1979. The study found that women who married or had children were less likely to reenroll in college because of these role obligations, not because of differences in pre-college characteristics, aspirations, college experiences, or earnings. The effects of marriage sharply depressed the odds of a return to college by women, but had no effect on a return to college by men. For both sexes, the probability of a return to college steadily declined with every year since the initial departure, and pre-college characteristics seemed to have little impact on the decision to return to school. (Contains 54 references.) (MDM)

The Effects of Adult Role Configurations on Re-enrollment in College

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Introduction

Two decades ago, social scientists tended to over-estimate the orderliness of college attendance. Higher education was often depicted as a full-time continuous process that was begun soon after graduation from high school and completed before adulthood. Since then, however, the growing presence of older students on American campuses has forced researchers to revise their preconceptions. Closer examination of attendance patterns has led to more detailed knowledge of how postsecondary educational careers are conducted. It is now known, for example, that delayed entry to college is quite common. A report based on the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72) found that 54% of students entering associate programs and 35% of those beginning bachelor's programs delayed entry to college beyond the fall following graduation from high school (Eagle and Schmitt, 1990a). Once enrolled, many students alternate between full-time and part-time attendance, extending time to degree.[1] Still another departure from the ideal of full-time continuous attendance is interrupted study.

More than 30 years ago Eckland (1964) recognized that termination of college studies--typically counted as attrition in conventional retention models--often is only a temporary interruption. The frequency of this type of disruption, now widely termed "stopout," has been documented by researchers working with the (NLS-72). Tracking the NLS-72 cohort for fourteen years, Eagle and Schmitt (1990b) found that 32.2% of entrants to associate programs and 26.6% of bachelor's students

[1] To adjust graduation rate reporting to allow for growing part-time attendance and other disruptions, the Joint Commission on Accountability Reporting (1995) recently recommended that graduation rates be reported over an "extended" tracking period ending at a "point in time at which nearly all--95 percent of all--awards to a starting cohort have been conferred." p. 10.

stopped out in the course of their postsecondary educational careers.[2] These estimates suggest that a substantial number of departures from higher education are only temporary. Indeed at the associate level, 65.4% of the NLS-72 cohort left college at some point, but of these leavers, 49.3% returned and were counted as stopouts rather than dropouts. Among bachelor's students, 49.1% left college, of whom 54.2% ultimately returned, becoming stopouts.[3]

In addition to relying on the ideal type of postsecondary schooling as a full-time continuous process, social scientists of a generation ago also made simplifying assumptions about how schooling fits into the life course. Both the early status attainment and human capital models had assumed a fixed sequence of role transitions--completion of formal schooling followed by entry to the full-time labor force. In fact labor force entry generally was defined as first full-time employment after completion of highest educational credential (e.g., Blau and Duncan, 1967). During the 1970s, however, social scientists began to acknowledge that the transition from schooling to work does not always proceed in such an orderly fashion. Beverly Duncan (Duncan, Featherman and Duncan, 1972) noticed for example that men from disadvantaged origins were unusually likely to interrupt their schooling with periods of full-time work.

During the late 1970s and the 1980s, research influenced by the life course perspective

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[2] Eagle and Schmitt (1990) also estimated stopout rates for the high school class of 1980, based on High School and Beyond (HSB) data. Because of the much shorter potential tracking period (from fall 1980 to early spring 1986), they almost certainly under-estimate ultimate stopout rates for this cohort.

[3] In the study by Eagle and Schmitt, stopouts are defined as students who experienced a break in their attendance at a particular type of institution and who did not transfer during the break. As of the end of the tracking period stopouts could have been reclassified into any of three categories: graduated, dropped out, or still enrolled.

generated a much more detailed picture of the timing of educational careers in relation not just to labor force entry but also to two additional milestones in the transition from youth to adulthood--marriage and parenthood. Several studies classified role sequences into those adhering to a modal order--school completion, entry to the full-time labor force, marriage, birth of first child--and those that did not. Marini (1984) found that about one-half of a sample of students who attended 10 high schools in Illinois in 1957-1958 experienced their role transitions in the expected order. Hogan (1978a) identified a similar pattern for men born between 1947 and 1952, as did Rindfuss, Swicegood and Rosenfeld (1987) for a cohort of men who were high school seniors in the spring of 1972 (the NLS-72 cohort).

However, entry to adult roles before completion of schooling also proved to be quite common, especially if school completion was redefined to encompass both full- and part-time schooling. Marini (1984) found that 34.5% of the women in her sample and 52.1% of the men worked full time before finishing school. Nor was it uncommon to marry or become a parent before finishing school. Marini (1984, 1987) found that 27.2% of women and 42.1% of men married before completing their studies and that 14.2% of women and 25.6% of men became parents before leaving school for the last time. Influenced by such findings, several studies of reentry to college have incorporated adult role obligations as predictors, once it was recognized that breaks in college attendance commonly coincide with the acquisition of work and family responsibilities that may influence the likelihood of subsequent reenrollment.

Studies of returning students fall into two categories. By far the largest group analyze reentry to college after a significant break in enrollment. The break may or may not follow successful completion of a degree program. A substantial literature has addressed reentry, especially by women,

profiling them and analyzing the barriers to enrollment and persistence in college.[4] A few studies have examined stopout behavior, which typically denotes reentry after a comparatively short break in enrollment. Stopout generally implies reenrollment after interrupted progress toward a particular degree rather than a return to college after completing a degree.

Both reentry and stopout can be seen as two-step processes, a break in attendance, followed by reenrollment. Griliches (1980: 295) argues that the best way to analyze these interruptions is to ask first who ceases attending and then ask about who returns to school. Although this suggestion is applicable both to reentry and to stopout, his own research focuses on the latter. He argues that returners are distinguished from the larger pool of permanent dropouts by their ability to benefit from additional schooling. Griliches finds that compared with other students, interrupters are older, have more prior schooling and higher Iqs, and come from more affluent backgrounds. To date, it appears that no studies have looked at stopout by modeling reenrollment among a pool of students who terminated their studies short of a degree, although one (Smart and Pascarella, 1987) predicted intention to reenroll among a sample of dropouts.

Previous studies of reenrollment tend to focus on women. Indeed with the exception of Smart and Pascarella (1987) all the methodologically rigorous earlier studies of reenrollment are limited to samples of women (Davis and Bumpass, 1976; Alexander and Reilly, 1981; Felmlee, 1988; Teachman and Paasch, 1989; Bradburn *et al.*, 1995). This emphasis is understandable given that most of the increase in older undergraduates on American campuses during the 1970s and 1980s can be attributed to the enrollment of women. Yet as I will argue, there is good reason to expect that the

[4] For review of this literature see Padula (1994).

process of returning to college differs by sex, justifying inclusion of men in studies of this phenomenon.

A Model of Reenrollment in College

Reenrollment is influenced by personal resources that are developed before a student first enters college--socioeconomic status, aspirations, and academic preparation. Reenrollment is also affected by initial experiences with college, by economic calculations and by role obligations.

Pre-college Experiences. Earlier research on return to school suggests a number of potentially relevant variables reflecting early experiences. Family socioeconomic status is central to the Wisconsin model of educational attainment (Sewell et al., 1980; Featherman and Hauser, 1978). It is expected that students from privileged backgrounds would be more likely to re-enroll than their peers, given the positive correlation between social origins and educational attainment documented in the status attainment literature. Smart and Pascarella (1987) found a positive correlation between father's occupation and intent to reenter, but several other indicators of socioeconomic status--number of siblings, mother's education, and family income--had no effect.

Similarly one would expect to find that other predictors of educational attainment would also be positively correlated with reenrollment. Indicators of academic ability, such as IQ, as well as high school grades, and having completed a college preparatory curriculum in high school are well established positive predictors of attainment (Alexander and Eckland, 1974; Marini, 1978). However, when prior educational attainment is controlled in models of reentry, the direct effects of these

background variables should be attenuated, since they are likely to be mediated at least in part through attainment. Most of the earlier studies found prior educational attainment to be positively correlated with reentry (Bradburn *et al.*, 1995; Felmlee, 1988; Teachman & Paasch, 1989). But only one (Teachman and Paasch, 1989) included curriculum, academic aptitude, or grades in the model. Only the latter two variables were positively correlated with reenrollment.

Since educational and occupational aspirations are also well-established predictors of attainment (Marini, 1978; Alexander and Eckland, 1974; Sewell et al., 1980), they too should have positive effects on reenrollment. Teachman and Paasch (1989) confirmed such an effect for educational plans, while Smart and Pascarella (1987) found that students who had not yet achieved their freshman-year educational goals 8 years later were especially likely to reenroll in college after suspending their studies short of a degree. Occupational aspirations have not yet been incorporated into a model of college reentry.

Educational and occupational aspirations often change after departure from college. Consequently in modeling reentry it is probably more important to measure these psychological constructs repeatedly during the period following the initial break in college attendance than it is to measure them before initial entry to college.

College Experiences. To date, college experiences prior to cessation of study have not been incorporated into models of college reentry. Yet it seems likely that at least some predictors of persistence in college may also predict re-enrollment as well. The two concepts most central to Tinto's (1975, 1993) influential model of persistence are integration into the academic and social systems of the college. Making analogy to Durkheim's (1961) concept of egoistic suicide, Tinto argues that

dropout is largely attributable to insufficient normative and structural integration into the academic and social domains of the college. Both types of integration reinforce commitment to completing the degree ("goal commitment") and to remaining at the college while doing so ("institutional commitment"). It is hypothesized that students who were relatively well integrated into the academic and social life of their college before they left are most likely to return.

Economic Factors. Several earlier studies of reentry examined the influence of factors related to employment and to economic situation. Felmlee (1988) argues that individuals who are least rewarded in their current job have the greatest incentive to leave work to go to college to improve their educational credentials and consequently their future occupational prospects. Several studies have confirmed a negative correlation between wages and reentry (Felmlee, 1988; Smart and Pascarella, 1987; Teachman and Paasch, 1989).[5] On the other hand Bradburn *et al.* (1995) point out that because schooling is costly, individuals who have access to economic resources are most able to afford additional schooling. These authors find a positive correlation between perceived economic well being and reentry to school. By the same logic one would expect that having a spouse with a high income would facilitate re-entry to college.

[5] Several additional occupational characteristics appear to influence reentry. In general individuals who have relatively little to lose or the most to gain by reallocating their energy from work to school are most likely to reenroll. Both Felmlee (1988) and Smart and Pascarella (1987) found positive correlations between reentry and occupational status of current job. In addition, in the Felmlee study women who had the shortest job tenure (and therefore presumably the least to gain from seniority) were more apt to reenter school. Finally, in the same vein, Smart and Pascarella found a negative correlation between intent to reenter college and intrinsic job satisfaction.

Role Obligations. Evidence suggests that work, marriage and parenthood tend to interfere with educational careers. Full-time work is negatively correlated with persistence (Anderson, 1981), as are marriage and having young children at home, especially for women (Teachman and Polonko, 1988). Not surprisingly, these effects on persistence lead to deficits in ultimate attainment. Early marriage and parenthood seem to reduce the educational attainment of women, but not that of men (Call and Otto, 1977; Marini, 1978, 1984b).

The findings of earlier research specifically on the effects of adult role obligations on reentry are less conclusive. Bradburn *et al.* (1995) found that women who were employed part time were more than twice as likely to reenter school as women who were out of the labor force. However they uncovered no effect of full-time employment on reentry. In explanation they argue that a return to school is comparatively expensive for full-time workers because of foregone earnings, while part timers have the most to gain from investing in additional schooling. Full-time/part-time employment status is not controlled in any of the other major studies of reenrollment.

With regard to family obligations, the evidence is ambiguous. Most quantitative studies of reentry women have been based on samples of married women, making it impossible to estimate the effects of marriage on reentry (Bradburn *et al.*, 1995; Davis and Bumpass, 1976; Teachman and Paasch, 1989). Felmlee (1988) did however find a negative influence of marriage on reentry among her sample of women who were employed full time. Meanwhile research on the effects of parental responsibilities on reentry are mixed. Two studies (Felmlee, 1988; and Teachman and Paasch, 1989) established that women who have preschoolers at home are less likely than women with no children or older children to reenroll in school. However Bradburn and her colleagues (1995) found no such effect

for women who reached maturity after World War II.

Explanations for the negative effects of adult roles on schooling are of several types. Some researchers have drawn on elements of the theory of role strain (Goode, 1960), arguing that adult roles compete with schooling for finite personal resources. Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987) attribute a negative effect of work hours on persistence and time to degree in part to the need to take fewer courses or cease attendance altogether in order to satisfy job demands. Others have proposed that marriage and parenthood generate temporal and financial pressures that erode both performance and satisfaction in the student role (Bishop and Van Dyk, 1977; Corman, 1983; Marini, 1984b, 1987). Marini, Chan and Raymond (1987) argue that entry to the labor force before school completion may lead to compromises in both domains. In general, however, these writers have drawn on the theory of role strain only implicitly.

Discussion of role strain has been more explicit in research on conflict between family roles and the work place, especially for women. Parenthood clearly constrains the occupational commitments of women, keeping them out of the labor force or reducing the number of hours they work (Moen, 1985; Presser and Baldwin, 1980). Strain appears to be a function of demands both at work and at home. Strain is positively correlated with work hours, and workload pressure, among other job-related factors (Voydanoff, 1988), while at home the presence of young children is an important source of strain among employed women (Kelley and Voydanoff, 1985). Arguably, the potential for family-school conflict is at least as great as that between the family and work. The time demands of college can easily equal those of employment. At the same time, unlike work, college represents a cost both from tuition and from foregone earnings.

Research on role strain in various substantive contexts has highlighted the difficulties of predicting role strain from the structure of role configurations alone. Strain is not a simple function of the number of roles an actor occupies simultaneously. Thoits (1983) found an inverse correlation between the number of roles occupied and psychological distress, while others have found a positive relationship (Hill, Hunter, and Chen, 1992). Some roles such as that of mother appear to generate more strain than others (Barnett and Baruch, 1985). The behavior of role partners can also affect levels of stress, as research on reentry women has shown. Among the factors found to mitigate the stress associated with balancing school and family are financial, emotional, and logistic support from the husband (Hill, Hunter, and Chen, 1992; Van Meter and Agronow, 1982; Berkove, 1979). This support becomes particularly important when the wife values non-family roles more highly than those of wife and mother (Van Meter and Agronow, 1982).

In their research on the determinants of psychological well being Greenberger and O'Neil (1993) greatly refined the measurement of actors' experience in their roles, taking into account not only social support for role performances, but also commitment to one's roles, the level of demands made by roles, evaluations by the actor of the quality of his or her performance in each role, and satisfaction in the role. In their study of the stress associated with work, marriage and parenting, all of these variables except demands affected role strain among men, while among women total work hours also influenced strain.

Although role strain is a dominant theme in explanations of the negative effects of adult roles on involvement in schooling, it is not the only theme. In their efforts to explain the negative effects of family roles on the educational attainment of women and the absence or negligibility of such effects on

that of men, researchers, somewhat surprisingly, have generally ignored the potential relevance of gender role socialization. Marini (1978), for example, frames her interpretation of the differential impact of marriage on educational attainment in terms of allocation.[6] In her view, marriage traditionally has offered women a more promising route to status attainment than the workplace, while for men investments in education and career have proved more important. Faced with these prospects, women have been more likely than men to pursue opportunities to marry and to allow early marriage to cut short their educational careers, according to Marini. Although the occupational opportunities for women have improved since the 1960s, when the cohort studied by Marini came of age, they remain unequal to those of men, lending her argument some force. Nevertheless, differences in gender role socialization must also be considered.

The literature on dual-earner households, with its focus on conflict between work and family roles, has proved a fertile source of theory and research relevant to the potential conflict between postsecondary schooling and adult roles. This literature suggests that work/family conflict may well be particularly intense for women because they are more frequently socialized to invest much more of themselves in the roles of parent and spouse than men are. Conversely, traditional gender role socialization teaches men that by meeting their obligations as breadwinners, they have discharged much of their obligation to their families as well. Thus for men, according to Hall (1972), work and family are sequential roles--family activities begin only in the evening, when work ends-- while women learn to regard work and family as simultaneous roles, since

[6] See Kerckhoff (1976) for a seminal discussion of status attainment as a process both of socialization and of allocation to social positions.

women's responsibilities, especially for children, continue throughout the day. The most systematic formulation of this argument is Pleck's (1985) role overload hypothesis, which rests on a bedrock of time use studies documenting that husbands of employed wives spend no more time on housework and childcare than husbands of full-time homemakers. As a result employed wives tend to devote more time to family and work roles in total than do men, rendering women most vulnerable to role strain.[7] Underlying this inequality according to Pleck is traditional sex role ideology, which assigns primary responsibility for housework and child care to women. In effect, then, women and men are socialized to different hierarchies of commitments to their role obligations.

If gender role socialization imposes a heavier burden on working wives and mothers than on their spouses, it may do so on student wives and mothers, as well. As I argued earlier, education is commonly regarded as an investment in human capital which pays its primary returns in the labor market. Consequently, women who choose to combine family roles and postsecondary schooling may confront role overload for the same reasons that working women do: School, like work, is perceived as a secondary role added to the primary family responsibilities. The student father and husband, by contrast often is considered by himself and by others to be investing in his primary role of breadwinner. Consequently, conflict between student and family is muted.

Socialization is not expected to contribute to a significant gender difference in work-

[7] Gove and his colleagues have attributed gender differences in stress among the married to the heavier family burdens assigned to women by gender role socialization (Gove, 1972; Gove & Tudor, 1973).

school conflict, however. For men these two roles are often perceived as central to masculine ideals of success, and they may well collide, or at least endure an uneasy coexistence. Female working students no doubt face a comparable potential for strain, since they have chosen to commit themselves both to work and to the accumulation of human capital in the form of educational credentials. Only when the individual assumes family obligations would gender role socialization be expected to create a major divergence in role demands.

Hypotheses

If adult role obligations tend to discourage involvement in the role of student, one would expect to find a negative association between adult role tenure and reenrollment in college among students who suspended their studies without completing a degree. The first hypothesis follows from this expectation:

1. *Net of other predictors of reenrollment, entry to the full-time labor force, marriage, and parenthood are each negatively correlated with reenrollment in college by individuals who stopped attending college before completing a degree.*

Even when background characteristics, high school preparation, educational expectations, and salient aspects of college experience and economic considerations are held constant, it is expected that adult roles will depress the odds of reenrollment.

To the extent that traditional gender role socialization remains influential, I expect the effects of family obligations to differ by sex:

2. *Marriage and responsibility for children will have a greater negative effect on the*

probability of reenrollment in college for women than for men, net of other predictors of reenrollment.

By contrast, both the allocation and socialization perspectives would seem to suggest an absence of gender differences in the intensity of work-school conflict. Both work and schooling may be seen as investments in human capital which may generate enhanced rewards in the labor market. Although these rewards generally are greater for men than for women, conflict between school and work is likely to be no more extreme for one sex than the other. Patterns of traditional gender role socialization lead to the same conclusion. Men learn to maximize investments in human capital, while women generally have not been so strongly encouraged to do so. Neither women who embrace the role of homemaker nor those who pursue a career learn to favor schooling over work or vice versa. Thus, there is no gender-based rationale for favoring work at the expense of school. Hypothesis number three follows from this argument:

3. *The effect of full-time work on the probability of reenrollment is no different for women than for men.*

These three propositions are tested on a national sample of former college students who dropped out of an associate or bachelor's degree program.

Data and Methods

The data are drawn from the NLS-72, sponsored by the National Center for Education

Statistics. The NLS-72 is a stratified, two-stage sample of seniors attending all high schools, public and private, in the United States during the 1971-1972 school year.[8] Students were tracked over a fourteen-year period, from fall 1972 through spring 1986, in five follow-ups. The data set contains a wealth of information on postsecondary educational careers, including high school background, academic aptitudes, and educational and occupational aspirations. Also available are complete histories of college attendance, work, marriage, and parenthood. Because detailed chronologies of marriage and parenthood were not collected until the fifth follow-up, the present study is based on the respondents to this wave. The analyses reported below focus on the initial seven years of the tracking period, from 1972 through 1979. A discrete time event history analysis will be used to estimate the risk of first transition from non-enrollment to reenrollment. The pool to be analyzed consists of individuals who terminated their enrollment in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution, without graduating. Each individual contributes a number of records equal to the number of academic years he or she was at risk of undergoing the transition, that is, the number of years the former student remained out of higher education. The records of returnees are censored after their initial resumption of study, either as full-time or part-time students.

Pre-college characteristics have been measured as constants, at a single point in time, in the senior year of high school. Included in the model are race/ethnicity, SES, type of program completed in high school, high school grades, and academic aptitude. (Table 1 summarizes the

[8] For details on the base survey and the first four follow-ups, see Riccobono et al. (1981), and for an in-depth description of sample design, data collection procedures and weighting of the fifth follow-up, see Tourangeau et al. (1986).

coding of all variables incorporated into the analysis, while their means and standard deviations are shown in Table 2.) Also included as a constant is the respondent's willingness to borrow to finance his/her schooling. The model contains several indicators of the respondent's attitudes toward schooling, career, and family life. These variables--occupational aspirations, plans for additional schooling and number of children expected--are time varying; they are measured repeatedly over the period during which the individual remained at risk for re-enrollment.

A second group of variables measure several aspects of the respondent's experience while enrolled in college. Although the NLS-72 data set does not permit refined measurement of academic and social integration, imperfect indicators of both concepts are available. GPA is commonly used as an indicator of academic integration in the persistence literature (e.g. Munro, 1981; Pascarella, Smart and Ethington, 1986; Stage, 1988), and will be employed here as a measure of how well a student met the college's academic standards. Likewise, no direct measures of the quality and quantity of student interactions with peers and faculty are available in the NLS. As a proxy, I have included in the model items eliciting satisfaction with teachers, social life, development of work skills, and intellectual growth. These items have been combined to create a single index of perceived fit between the student and the college's academic and social climate--"Integration into College Life" (Anderson, 1981). Also controlled in the model are full-time/part-time status, and the degree program in which the respondent was enrolled. All indicators of college experience reference the last year of enrollment prior to cessation of study.

Two economic variables have been incorporated into the model-- the respondent's earnings and spouse's earnings, which have been set to 0 for unmarried individuals. The nature of

the influence of earnings is not clear in advance. Earnings may have a positive effect on reenrollment, if they make schooling more affordable or a negative effect if they create an incentive to remain employed rather than invest in additional schooling.

In order to model the possibility that the probability of reenrollment shifts autonomously with time, a set of 5 dummy variables representing each year from 1975 through 1979 was introduced as well. Patterns in the coefficients of these indicators may suggest the presence of time-sensitive determinants that have not been controlled elsewhere in the model.

Finally, role configurations are modelled as main effects using indicators of full-time work, marriage, and parental responsibilities. Two- and three-way interactions are introduced to test whether the effects of role configurations can be represented adequately as the sum of the effects of the component roles.[9]

Results

Two sets of equations, one for women and one for men, are reported in Table 3. In equation 1, only the main effects of roles are included, together with year indicators. In equation 2 pre-college characteristics are introduced, as well as indicators of evolving educational plans and occupational aspirations during the period following the initial break in attendance. Finally in equation 3 measures of college experience and of earnings are introduced.

Equation 1 reports negative unadjusted effects of all three adult roles for women and

[9] For a few variables, the mean has been substituted for missing values, and the case referenced with a missing data dichotomy. (See Cohen and Cohen, 1977).

negative effects of work and parenthood for men. Marriage does not influence the likelihood that men will return to college. For women child care responsibilities hurt the chances of reenrollment the most, followed by marriage and full-time work, while for men work and parental responsibilities exert about equal influences.

When these role effects are fully adjusted for all other predictors in the model (equation 3) family roles retain their negative effects on reenrollment for women. Indeed these effects are virtually undiminished. Women who are married or have children are less likely to reenroll in college because of these role obligations, not because of differences in pre-college characteristics, aspirations, college experiences or earnings. However, the tendency of working women not to reenroll can be explained by other predictors, in particular by their own earnings, which are negatively correlated with a return to school. This pattern of effects may mean that the attraction of earnings more than the prospect of work-school conflict accounts for the tendency of working women to stay out of college.

Looking at the fully adjusted role effects for men (equation 3), we find that here again, about one-half of the negative effect of work on reenrollment is transmitted through other variables in the model, especially earnings. And while the negative effect of parenthood persists in the adjusted equation, it does not quite achieve statistical significance.

The effect of marriage on reenrollment differs strikingly by gender: it sharply depresses the odds of a return to college by women, but makes no difference for men whatsoever. When a single equation is estimated on the data for both sexes combined, this difference is statistically significant, both in the unadjusted and adjusted equations (Table 4, equations 1 and 2). The same

equations show that there is no gender difference in the extent to which work and parental obligations hamper a return to college.

In short the first hypothesis is only partly sustained. Net of other predictors of reenrollment, only marriage and parenthood reduce the likelihood of reenrollment and only for women. Similarly, the second hypothesis predicting gender differences in the effects of family roles is only partly sustained. Marriage does reduce the odds of reentry for women more than men. Parenthood seems to be more incompatible with a return to college for women than for men, but this interaction, while in the expected direction, does not quite achieve statistical significance. As proposed in the third hypothesis, there is no gender difference in the influence of work.

Several additional outcomes are worth noting. For both sexes, the probability of a return to college steadily declines with every year elapsed since the initial departure. The year coefficients become progressively more negative over time (Table 3). The reasons for this pattern are unclear, but norms regarding the best age for college study may discourage some former undergraduates from resuming their studies.

Pre-college characteristics seem to have little impact on decisions about whether to return to college. Race, SES, high school program, and high school grades make virtually no difference. Only aptitude has any effect: relatively able students are more likely than their peers to reenroll. By contrast, aspirations do matter. Students of both sexes who maintained high educational ambitions after leaving college were especially likely to return, and so were women who aspired to a managerial or professional occupation. For men, occupational aspirations are not important,

but a willingness to borrow to finance their schooling does raise prospects for resumption of study. Finally, as mentioned earlier, men and women who have relatively high earnings are less likely to reenroll in college than those who report lower earnings. However, surprisingly spouse's earnings do not appear to influence the likelihood of reenrollment for men or women.

Adults in modern societies typically manage several major roles simultaneously. Indeed, it has been argued that occupancy of the landmark roles associated with adulthood is a better indicator of adult status than chronological age (Hagestad and Neugarten, 1985), which all too often is the criterion used to identify subjects in studies of adults in higher education. Because roles typically are occupied in clusters, the effects of role configurations on reenrollment have been estimated here. Table 4, equations 3 and 4, report the two-way interactions between roles, as well as their three-way interaction. Work and marriage together seem slightly more congenial to reenrollment than one would expect from the sum of their main effects (equation 3), but when other predictors of reenrollment are taken into account, this interaction effect disappears. The influence of role configurations can be represented adequately as the sum of the effects of their component roles.

Equation 4 of Table 4 reports that even when all other variables in the model, including role configurations, are controlled, women are less likely than men to reenroll in college after a break in attendance. Women are vulnerable not only to the negative effects of family role obligations on reenrollment but also to an additional reluctance to reenroll for reasons that lie beyond the constructs included in the model.

Discussion

The finding that marriage and parental responsibilities hinder the reenrollment of women but not of men is consistent with earlier work that has documented the negative influence of these roles on educational outcomes for women. As mentioned above, several studies have found that early marriage and parenthood tend to depress the subsequent educational attainment of women. Other work has begun to document the processes which generate this aggregate effect. We have noted that family roles reduce the odds of women's persistence in college. The work reported here suggests that family obligations also reduce the likelihood that women who leave college will subsequently return.

An unanticipated result of this study is the magnitude of the gender difference in the effect of marriage on reenrollment. Returning to Table 3, equation 3, we find that for women the logit coefficient associated with marriage is -0.50 while that for men is .07. The difference between these two effects is statistically significant. Surprisingly, the difference between the effect of parental responsibilities for women (-0.71) and for men (-0.41) is not statistically significant (see the test of gender interactions in Table 4, equation 2). More research is needed to understand this pattern of gender differences. Perhaps the sample of former college goers in this study differ from the samples observed in the time use studies cited above (Pleck, 1985), which concluded that husbands in dual earner households contribute no more hours to housework or child care than those in single earner homes. Perhaps by the 1970s traditional gender roles among the cohort entering its mid-twenties had evolved somewhat. Men may have begun to share child care responsibilities sufficiently that these obligations discouraged reenrollment in college to some

extent. (Note that the parental coefficient for men is negative, although not of the same magnitude as that for women and not statistically significant.) Even so, shifting gender roles apparently did not affect marriage itself in the same way. Perhaps the greater returns to schooling enjoyed by men created a greater incentive for married men to resume their studies than for married women to do so. In addition, women are more likely to be single parents than are men, and single parents may have an additional incentive to return to school to invest in their human capital, although time demands and lack of support make this a difficult option. These findings warrant further investigation.

Using the NLS-72 data set, it will be possible to introduce some refinements to this evolving study. The degree of conflict between family roles and school may depend on the potential demands of the schooling. Part-time attendance offers more flexibility in managing competing obligations than does a full-time commitment. Thus one obvious extension of these analyses will be separate models for reenrollment in full-time and part-time study. In addition, adult role obligations may represent a greater impediment to enrollment in bachelor's programs than associate programs. Teachman and Paasch (1989) found that child care responsibilities hindered the return of married women to four-year institutions but not to two-year programs. Their work suggests that reenrollment in two- and four-year programs should be modelled separately.

Other drawbacks are inherent in the NLS-72 data. The work of Greenberger and O'Neil (1993) on the relationship between role configurations and role strain has called attention to the importance of actors' experience in their roles. They found that the level of commitment to roles,

satisfaction with roles, the extent to which the actor evaluates his or her role performances positively and support from others all influence strain. Future research on the effects of adult role configurations on reentry to college should measure satisfaction, commitment, self evaluation, and support for adult roles as well as for the prospective role of college student. Indicators of these concepts are not available in the NLS-72 data set.

Bradburn and her colleagues (1995) found cohort effects in their study of reentry among women spanning several cohorts. For women who came of age before World War II, the presence of preschoolers hindered a return to school, while for women who were born later there was no such effect. The NLS-72 tracks a single cohort of high school seniors who entered young adulthood during the 1970s and 1980s as women entered the labor force in large numbers. It is now possible to undertake a parallel study on a younger cohort--high school sophomores and seniors in the spring of 1980--using the High School and Beyond data set. By replicating the analysis on this cohort, it will be possible to look for the presence of possible cohort effects associated with changing gender roles and occupational opportunities for women.

Table 1: Coding of Variables in Models Predicting Re-enrollment After Premature Termination of Postsecondary Study.

Independent Variables

Constant Explanatory Variables	
Year	A set of dichotomous dummy temporal indicators representing each year, 1975 through 1979. Each variable is coded 1 if the observation corresponds to that year, else 0. 1974 is the reference category-- the first year in which re-enrollment could have occurred.
Race	1= non-white; 0 = white
SES	Index derived from an equally weighted linear composite of father's education, mother's education, father's occupation, family income, and household items.
High School Program	Coded as two dummy variables: academic program; general program. Vocational program is the reference category.
High School Average	Coded 1 (F) to 14 (A+) from school record information, and imputed by ETS nonlinear regression procedure where missing (See Riccobono et al.,1981, Appendix E).
Academic Aptitude	An index constructed by summing over the following four subtests administered in a base-year aptitude battery: vocabulary, reading, letter groups, and mathematics. Each subtest is scaled with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.
Willingness to Borrow	From Base Survey. Ordinal indicator of amount respondent is willing to borrow to finance postsecondary study, where 0 = $0, 1 = less than $500, 2 = $500 to $999, 3=$1,000 to $1,999, 4 = $2,000 to $3,999, and 5 = $4,000 or more.
Time-Varying Explanatory Variables	
Occupational Aspirations	The respondent's occupational aspirations. Coded 1 for managerial or professional and 0 for all other occupational categories. Measured in 1973, 1974, and 1976, and lagged.

Table 1 continues on next page.

Table 1, continued.

Educational Plans	Ordinal indicator of amount of schooling respondent plans to attain. 1 = high school or less; 2 = graduate from a vocational, technical, business, or trade school; 3 = Attend a junior college; 4 attend a four-year college or university; 5 go to a graduate or professional school after college. Measured in 1973, 1974, and 1976 and lagged.
Expected Fertility	The number of children the respondent expects to have. Measured at two points in time-- October of 1973 and 1976.
Last Degree Pursued	The degree the respondent was pursuing in October of the year before interrupting his/her study. Coded as a set of dummy variables: bachelor's degree or higher =1, else 0; associate degree = 1, else 0; and license/certificate=1, else 0. The reference category is none/other.
FT/PT Attendance	The student's full-time/part-time status in October of the year before the interruption of study. Coded 1 for full time and 0 for part time.
Integration into College Life	The respondent's degree of satisfaction with several aspects of college experience in the year before interrupting study. An equally weighted scale of satisfaction with the personal qualities of teachers, social life on campus, development of work skills, and intellectual growth, and amount of money the student had available while in college. Each item was coded on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), and all 5 items were averaged.
GPA	Self-reported, on a scale from 1 (mostly D or below) to 7 (mostly A). References the academic year immediately preceding stopout.
Type of Institution	Type of institution attended immediately before stopout. 1= four-year institution, 0= community college.
Own Earnings	Weekly earnings of respondent, expressed in 1979 dollars and lagged.

Table 1 continues on next page.

Table 1, continued.

Spouse Earnings	Weekly earnings of spouse, expressed in 1979 dollars and lagged. Set to 0 if respondent was not married.
Worked Full Time	Coded 1 if respondent worked full-time in October of the year immediately preceding the year referenced by the dependent variable, else 0.
Married	Coded 1 if respondent was married at least one-half of the academic year immediately preceding the year referenced by the dependent variable, else 0.
Parent of Young Child	Coded 1 if respondent lived with one or more children 24 months or younger in October of the academic year referenced by the dependent variable, else 0.
	Dependent Variables
Interrupted Study (Re-enrollment after premature termination of study)	Coded 1 if respondent attended a two- or four-year postsecondary institution, ceased attending for a year or more without completing a degree, and re-enrolled in the referenced year. Coded 0 if respondent stopped attending and did not re-enroll in the referenced year. (Each person-year contributes one record to the data set.)

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Variables in Event History Analyses Predicting Re-enrollment After Premature Termination of Postsecondary Study

	Men		Women	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Re-enrollment	0.17	0.38	0.15	0.35
Worked Full Time	0.88	0.33	0.74	0.44
Married	0.35	0.48	0.46	0.50
Parent of Young Child	0.06	0.25	0.08	0.27
Year= 1975	0.07	0.26	0.07	0.25
Year= 1976	0.10	0.30	0.10	0.30
Year= 1977	0.21	0.41	0.23	0.42
Year= 1978	0.29	0.46	0.29	0.45
Year= 1979	0.30	0.46	0.29	0.45
Race (non-white)	0.10	0.29	0.15	0.36
SES	0.24	0.70	0.19	0.72
Academic High School Program	0.66	0.47	0.65	0.48
General High School Program	0.25	0.44	0.25	0.43
High School Average	9.88	2.10	10.87	2.02
Aptitude	219.37	22.86	219.90	23.67
Aptitude (missing data dichotomy)	0.26	0.44	0.27	0.44
Willingness to Borrow	2.91	1.86	2.95	1.72
Willingness to Borrow (missing data dichotomy)	.04	0.19	0.05	0.22
Occupational Aspirations (professional/managerial)	0.63	0.48	0.65	0.48
Educational Plans	5.09	1.19	5.19	1.12
Educational Plans (missing data dichotomy)	0.04	0.19	0.04	0.20
Expected Fertility	2.26	1.18	2.32	1.18
Last Degree Pursued (Bachelor's/Adv./Profl)	0.78	0.42	0.76	0.43
Last Attendance Status (FT)	0.90	0.30	0.91	0.29

Table 2 continues on next page.

Table 2, Continued.

	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Integration into College Life	3.82	0.66	3.91	0.63
College GPA	4.56	1.27	4.99	1.20
College GPA (missing data dichotomy)	0.03	0.16	0.02	0.14
Own Earnings (Weekly)	242.66	154.93	174.06	116.18
Spouse's Earnings (Weekly)	31.73	75.18	92.51	143.89

Table 3. Event History Models of Re-enrollment After Suspension of Postsecondary Study

	Women			Men		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Worked full time	-0.23*	-0.19	0.00	-0.45**	-0.38**	-0.23
Parent of young child	-0.79**	-0.69**	-0.71**	-0.47*	-0.39	-0.41
Married	-0.57*	-0.49**	-0.50**	-0.01	0.07	0.07
Year=1975	-1.04**	-1.11**	-1.12**	-0.70**	-0.65*	-0.69**
Year=1976	-1.27**	-1.44**	-1.47**	-1.19**	-1.24**	-1.33**
Year=1977	-1.98**	-2.61**	-2.58**	-1.74**	-2.18**	-2.25**
Year=1978	-1.95**	-2.58**	-2.54**	-1.88**	-2.34**	-2.38**
Year=1979	-2.16**	-2.79**	-2.73**	-2.17**	-2.64**	-2.67**
Race (non-white)		0.12	0.15		0.05	0.07
SES		0.11	0.13		0.03	0.04
Academic High School Program		0.14	0.16		0.35	0.27
General High School Program		0.20	0.19		0.15	0.11
High School Average		0.03	0.02		0.04	0.04
Academic Aptitude		0.01*	0.01*		0.01**	0.01**
Occupational Aspirations		0.39**	0.41**		0.14	0.12
Educational Plans		0.28**	0.27**		0.31**	0.29**
Willingness to Borrow for Education		0.03	0.04		0.07**	0.08**
Number of Children Planned		-0.02	-0.01		0.04	0.04
Last Degree Pursued: Bachelor's			0.02			0.24
Integration into College Life			-0.11			-0.15*
Last Attended Full Time			-0.31*			-0.45**
College GPA at Departure			0.09*			0.06
Own Earnings			-0.15**			-0.10*
Spouse's Earnings			0.00			0.00
CONSTANT	0.46	-2.55**	-2.03**	0.51*	-3.47**	-2.44**
Model Chi Square	228.33	373.07	390.18	216.36	380.04	405.18
df	8	21	28	8	21	28

Logit coefficients reported.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 4: Effects of Roles on the Probability of Re-enrollment after Premature Termination of Postsecondary Study

	Gender Interactions		Role Configurations	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Unadjusted	Adjusted
Work full-time (≥ 35 hrs./wk.)	-0.46**	-0.20	-0.34**	-0.14
Married	-0.02	0.07	-0.63**	-0.41*
Parent of Young Child (< 25 mos.)	-0.47*	-0.38	-0.28	0.07
Work FT × Married			0.36*	0.29
Work FT × Parent			-1.30	-1.49
Married × Parent			-0.35	-0.55
Work × Married × Parent			1.47	1.52
Gender (female)	-0.19	-0.25		-0.28**
Gender × Married	-0.53**	-0.58**		
Gender × Parent	-0.32	-0.32		
Gender × Work	0.24	0.17		
Year=1975	-0.87**	-0.89**	-0.89**	-0.90**
Year=1976	-1.22**	-1.38**	-1.25**	-1.39**
Year=1977	-1.85**	-2.40**	-1.87**	-2.40**
Year=1978	-1.91**	-2.45**	-1.93**	-2.45**
Year=1979	-2.16**	-2.69**	-2.18**	-2.69**
Constant	0.58**	-2.13**	0.51**	-2.05**
Model Chi Square	451.71	782.80	431.88	769.59
df	12	32	12	33

N = 8,764
* p < .05
** p < .01
[1] Logit coefficients are reported.

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